
Volume 3. Air Operator Technical Administration

CHAPTER 1. OPERATIONS SPECIFICATIONS

SECTION 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. APPLICABILITY. This chapter contains direction and guidance for issuance of operations specifications (OpSpecs) to Title 14 of the Code of Federal Regulations (14 CFR) parts 121, 125, 129, 135, 142, and 145 certificate holders. For part 142 certificate holders “training specifications” shall be referred to as OpSpecs herein. Direction and guidance is also included for amending, canceling, suspending, or revoking the OpSpecs for parts 121, 125, and 135 certificate holders. Information on the processing of part 129 foreign air carrier operations specifications is contained in chapter 4 of volume 2.

3. HISTORY OF OPSPECS. The early U.S. Civil Air Regulations (CAR) did not provide for OpSpecs. A valid certificate or temporary permit was the principal federal authorization for conducting any air commerce operations. In addition to the certificate or permit, each operator had to possess valid competency letters, or temporary letters, issued by the Secretary of Commerce. These letters, which contained information relating to the operator's services, routes, aircraft, maintenance, airmen, and weather procedures, were appended to and considered part of the operating certificate. For example, CAR part 61.01 required each air carrier to operate in compliance with the terms, conditions, specifications, limitations, or other provisions of its certificate or temporary permit which included the competency or temporary letters. In 1953, the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) revised the CARs to require that each operator apply for OpSpecs at the time of application for an air carrier certificate. Air carriers that existed at that time were issued OpSpecs to be used instead of the competency or temporary letters. These revised rules specified that the OpSpecs were not part of an air carrier certificate.

5. CONCEPTUAL NEED FOR OPSPECS. Within the air transportation industry there is a need to establish and administer safety standards to accommodate many variables. These variables include: a wide range of aircraft, varied operator capabilities, the various situations requiring different types of air transportation, and the continual, rapid changes in aviation technology. It is impractical to address these variables through the promulgation of safety regulations for each and every type of air transport situation and the varying degrees of operator capabilities. Also, it is impractical to address the rapidly changing aviation tech-

nology and environment through the regulatory process. Safety regulations would be extremely complex and unwieldy if all possible variations and situations were addressed by regulation. Instead, the safety standards established by regulation should usually have a broad application that allows varying acceptable methods of compliance. The OpSpecs provide an effective method for establishing safety standards that address a wide range of variables. In addition, OpSpecs can be adapted to a specific certificate holder or operator's class and size of aircraft and type and kinds of operations. OpSpecs can be tailored to suit an individual certificate holder or operator's needs. Only those authorizations, limitations, standards, and procedures that are applicable to a certificate holder or operator need to be included.

7. LEGAL BASIS FOR OPSPECS. Title 49 of the United States Code (49 U.S.C.)(formerly, the Federal Aviation Act (FA Act) of 1958), through the Secretary of Transportation, empowers the FAA to issue certificates to qualified air operators. Title 49 U.S.C., § 44701 requires each air carrier certificate to include the terms, conditions, and limitations reasonably necessary to ensure safety in air transportation. Included in FAA certificates issued to air operators conducting operations under parts 121, 125, 135, 142, and 145 is a stipulation that those operations must be conducted in accordance with the provisions and limitations specified in the OpSpecs. The regulations in 14 CFR part 119 require that the OpSpecs issued to parts 121, 125, and 135 certificate holders specify the authorizations, limitations, and certain procedures under which each type of operation must be conducted and under which each class and size of aircraft must be operated. Part 119 specifies in general terms the basic content of OpSpecs for each kind of operation. The regulations also state that a person engaged in operations governed by OpSpecs issued under parts 121, 125, 135, 142, or 145 may not conduct those operations either without OpSpecs or in violation of the appropriate OpSpecs. These regulations also stipulate that the Administrator may add to or amend the OpSpecs whenever necessary to address particular situations. In addition, the rule provides for the suspension or cancellation of OpSpecs for cause. For example, the OpSpecs may be suspended if the operator fails to recognize the Administrator's right of inspection. The Administrator may direct the surrender of the OpSpecs for certain activities by the operator, such as

failing to be adequately equipped or terminating operations. In the event the Administrator directs the operator to surrender its OpSpecs, the Notice of Surrender must also be filed with the Director, Office of Aviation Analysis, Department of Transportation.

9. STANDARD OPSPECS.

A. Standard OpSpecs paragraphs are developed by the Flight Standards Service at Washington headquarters. The process used at headquarters for developing standard OpSpecs paragraphs ensures appropriate coordination with regional flight standards personnel and with other FAA services and offices that could be affected by air carrier operations. The process also ensures that before the standard OpSpecs are finalized, appropriate coordination is accomplished with affected industry groups. Since standard OpSpecs specify limitations, conditions, and other provisions which operators must comply with, coordination with industry is essential to a mutual and clear understanding of the effect they will have on industry. After appropriate coordination has been completed, drafts of the new standard paragraphs, or revisions to existing paragraphs are finalized and incorporated into the operations specifications subsystem (OPSS).

B. Through the use of standard OpSpecs paragraphs, the FAA and industry are assured that air operators and certificate holders conducting comparable operations with comparable equipment are held to the same standards. Occasionally, a situation may occur in which it becomes necessary to issue a certificate holder or operator an OpSpec paragraph that is nonstandard because of a unique situation not provided for in the standard paragraphs. In those cases when a nonstandard paragraph is more restrictive than the standard paragraph, justifiable reasons must exist, since the operator could be placed at a competitive disadvantage.

Refer to volume 3, chapter 1, section 2 for the nonstandard OpSpec paragraph request process.

11. AVAILABILITY OF OPSPECS TO CREWMEMBERS AND OTHER EMPLOYEE PERSONNEL. 14 CFR §§ 121.135, 125.43, and 135.23 provide the requirements for OpSpecs information be included in operator manuals or made available for the certificate holder's employees to be informed of the contents, as applicable. Many operators meet this requirement by including a copy of the applicable parts of the OpSpecs in the appropriate sections of their manuals. The language used in OpSpecs, however, is not designed to apply to particular situations, but is written to specify absolute minimum conditions or provisions for a broad range of issues and situations. The application of a particular OpSpecs authorization, limitation, and/or provision may not be readily apparent to a particular situation. As a result, OpSpecs, which are legal documents, are not easy to use or interpret during any particular operational situation. Part 119 requires the operator to insert pertinent excerpts from the OpSpecs in the General Operations Manual (GOM) for ready use by their crewmembers and other employee personnel. The OpSpecs information in an operator's manual should pertain only to that operator's type of operation and be written in a manner that is directly applicable to the certificate holder or operator's crewmembers and/or other employee personnel. The regulations also require that when OpSpecs information is incorporated into the operator's manual, the text will clearly identify each excerpt as part of the OpSpecs and state that compliance with each OpSpec is mandatory.

12. - 20. RESERVED.

[PAGES 3-3 THROUGH 3-12 RESERVED]